



Department of Energy

Golden Field Office
1617 Cole Boulevard
Golden, Colorado 80401-3393

MAY 25, 2011

DISTRIBUTION LIST

SUBJECT: NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING - PROPOSED RENEWABLE FUEL HEAT PLANT IMPROVEMENTS AT THE NATIONAL RENEWABLE ENERGY LABORATORY SOUTH TABLE MOUNTAIN SITE, GOLDEN, CO (DOE/EA-1887)

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is proposing to make improvements to the Renewable Fuel Heat Plant (RFHP) including construction and operation of a wood chip storage silo and associated material handling conveyances and utilization of regional wood sources. Details of the proposed project and its location are contained below.

Pursuant to the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and DOE's implementing procedures for compliance with NEPA (10 CFR Part 1021), DOE is preparing a draft Supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) to:

- Identify potential adverse environmental effects as well as ways to avoid, minimize or mitigate such effects should this proposed project be implemented;
- Evaluate viable alternatives to the proposed action, including a no action alternative;
- Describe the relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity; and
- Characterize any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources that would be involved should this proposed project be implemented.

SITE BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) is the premier DOE national laboratory dedicated to the research, development, and deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies. As depicted in Figure 1, NREL is comprised of three main sites: 1) South Table Mountain (STM); 2) Denver West Office Park (DWOP); and 3) the National Wind Technology Center (NWTCT). Other facilities include the Renewable Fuels and Lubricants (ReFUEL) Research Laboratory and Joyce Street facilities as well as the Golden Hill office site. Detail regarding NREL's mission and research programs is available on the NREL website at: <http://www.nrel.gov>.



The 327-acre STM site is located on the southeast side of South Table Mountain, north of Interstate 70 and west of the Interstate 70 and Denver West Boulevard interchange in unincorporated Jefferson County, near Golden, Colorado (Legal description: Township 3 S, Range 70 W, Section 36, and Township 4 S, Range 70 W, Section 1) (see Figure 1). Only a portion of the site, 136 acres, is available for development. A total of 177 acres is protected by a conservation easement and development of the remaining 14 acres is restricted by utility easements. The community of Pleasant View is adjacent to the southern border of the STM site. The STM site includes acreage on the South Table Mountain mesa top, slope, and toe, and was formerly part of the Colorado National Guard facility at Camp George West. There are currently seven laboratory buildings, a few small test facilities, and several support buildings on the site.

The RFHP is located on the STM site northeast of the Field Test Laboratory Building (see Figure 2) and has been in operation for two years. The RFHP was designed to reduce NREL's current STM site consumption of natural gas (i.e., a non-renewable resource) by an estimated 75 to 80 percent. Through the use of forest thinning and other wood waste, renewable resources replace most natural gas usage in the primary site heating boiler. The project showcases the viability of wood waste biomass fuels as an alternative to fossil fuel heating.

In July 2007, DOE issued the Final Environmental Assessment of Three Site Development Projects at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory South Table Mountain Site (DOE/EA-1573) and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The 2007 Environmental Assessment tiered from the 2003 Final Site-Wide Environmental Assessment of the NREL STM Site (DOE/EA-1440) and, for some resource areas, provided updated descriptions of the existing environment at the STM site and impacts expected from the three proposed projects. The RFHP construction and operation was one of the three projects addressed in the 2007 Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1573).

The subject of this Supplemental EA includes the proposed action discussed below which would 1) increase the wood chip storage capacity to provide additional fuel supply for the RFHP, reducing the potential for a plant shut-down due to exhausted fuel supply; and 2) have a wider range of high-quality wood sources available for use. These contribute to the goal of supporting and advancing DOE's mission to increase the use of renewable fuels by reducing use of natural gas.

PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The following presents a summary of the Proposed Action and No Action alternative descriptions.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is to implement improvements to the RFHP, mainly the construction and operation of a concrete wood chip storage silo and associated material handling conveyances, and expanding the source area for wood supplies to include

regional, as well as Front Range resources. The proposed silo would be about 20 feet in diameter on a 30-foot pad and about 75 feet tall, with a volume of about 520 cubic yards. A bucket elevator/chute would extend about 25 feet above the top of the proposed silo. The proposed location for this project is a paved, previously disturbed area immediately south of the existing RFHP facility and west of the central ephemeral channel (see Figure 2). This area was included in Zone 4 – Central Campus as part of the STM campus build-out analyzed in the July 2003 Final Site-Wide Environmental Assessment.

The evaluation of impacts will include an analysis of effects from expanding the source of the wood chip fuel to include other regional sources. Additional locations and suppliers would provide increased flexibility for the RFHP to receive high quality wood product in sufficient volumes.

Development of a Reasonable Range Of Alternatives

DOE is required to consider a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed action during an environmental review. The definition of alternatives is governed by the “rule of reason”. Reasonable alternatives are those that may be feasibly carried out based on environmental, technical, and economic factors.

The No Action Alternative will be addressed which would keep the RFHP in its current configuration, add no new silo, and maintain current fuel sourcing practices.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS/ISSUES SCOPED FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The Supplemental EA will describe and analyze any primary, direct, induced, indirect and cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action and alternatives, and will identify possible mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate those impacts. Beneficial and adverse, on-site and off-site, construction, operation, and maintenance impacts will be discussed, as appropriate. The Supplemental EA will discuss impacts that may result to:

- Land Use and Planning
- Traffic and Circulation
- Air Quality
- Visual Quality/Aesthetics
- Water Resources
- Noise
- Accident Risk Analysis
- Intentional Destructive Acts

PUBLIC SCOPING

The DOE Golden Field Office will make this letter available to all interested federal, state, and local agencies to provide input on issues to be addressed in the Supplemental EA. Agencies are invited to identify the issues, within their statutory responsibilities that should be considered in the Supplemental EA. The general public is also invited to submit comments on the scope of the Supplemental EA.

No formal public scoping meeting is currently planned for this project. This letter as well as the draft Supplemental EA, when it is available, will be posted in the DOE Golden Field Office online reading room:

http://www.eere.energy.gov/golden/Reading_Room.aspx.

The DOE Golden Field Office welcomes your input throughout our NEPA Process. Please submit your written comments regarding this scoping document on or before **June 16, 2011**, to:

NREL NEPA Comments
National Renewable Energy Laboratory,
EHS Office, M.S. RSF 103
1617 Cole Boulevard
Golden, CO 80401-3393
(303) 275-4002 (fax)
Email: NREL.NEPA.Comments@nrel.gov

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Lori Plummer, NEPA Compliance Officer
U.S. Department of Energy, Golden Field Office

Enclosures:

Figure 1. Regional Location of the STM Site

Figure 2. Location of the Proposed Wood Chip Storage Silo

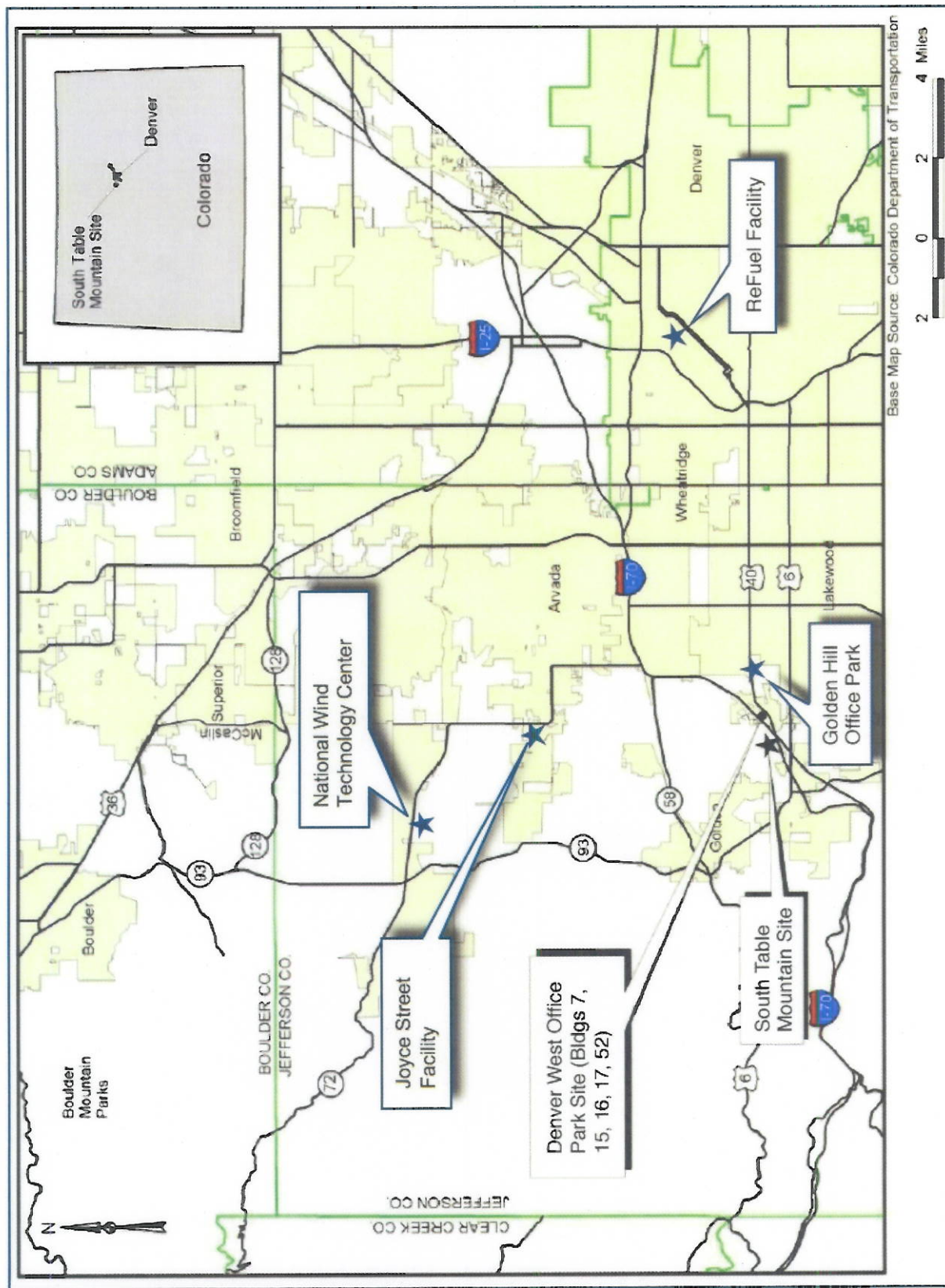


Figure 1. Regional Location of the STM Site

Site Development Zones

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|----------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 1 | Top of Mesa Buildable Area | AFUF | Alternative Fuels User Facility |
| 2 | Conservation Area | FTLB | Field Test Laboratory Building |
| 3 | West Campus | IBRF | Integrated Biorefinery Research Facility |
| 4 | Central Campus | OTF | Outdoor Test Facility |
| 5 | East Campus | RFHP | Renewable Fuel Heating Plant |
| 6 | Camp George West Parcel | RSF | Research Support Facility |
| 7 | Historic Resources | S&TF | Science & Technology Facility |
| | | SEB | Site Entrance Building |
| | | SERF | Solar Energy Research Facility |
| | | SRRL | Solar Radiation Research Laboratory |
| | | TTF | Thermal Test Facility |
| | | WHF | Waste Handling Facility |

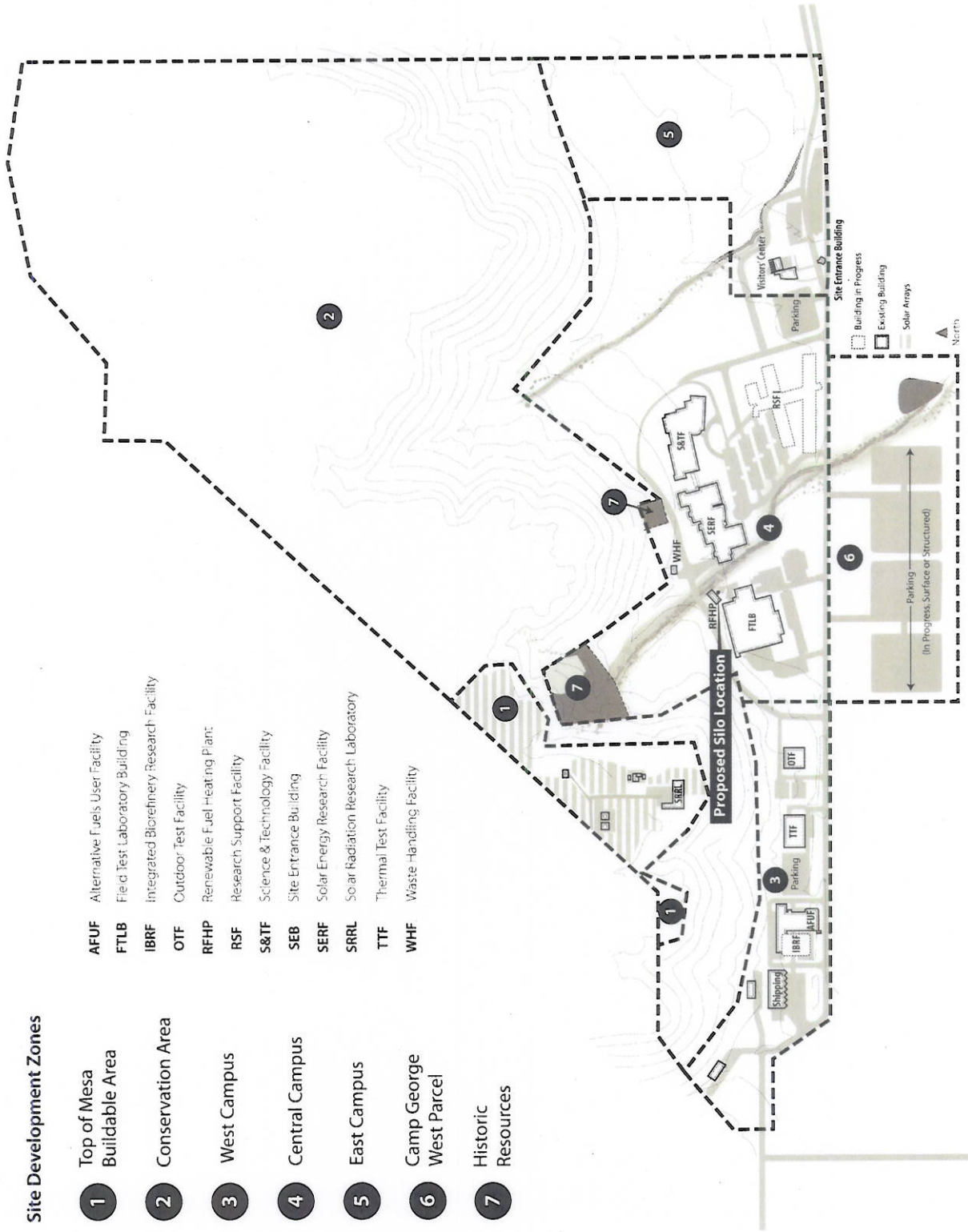


Figure 2. Location of the Proposed Wood Chip Storage Silo